EMMA THOMPSON: AWARDS SHOW MVP

THE BRIT ACTRESS LIVENS UP THE CEREMONIES AGAIN. PAGE 12

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Tuesday, January 21, 2014 www.metro.us | t: MetroPhilly | f: MetroPhilly

Woman killed in purse theft

A violent weekend. From Friday to Sunday, police pronounced six homicides with no arrests made as of Monday evening. **Robbery gone wrong.** Amber Long, 26, was shot and killed in front of her mother as two men tried to steal the women's handbags. **Family ties.** A slain 19-year-old, an aspiring boxer, was identified as the son of a Philadelphia police officer.

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Take James Franco's reading suggestions

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Use Twitter to book your next vacation

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Babies later in life — is it all part of a 'Big Lie'?

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A DE-VINE ARTISAN

PAGE 04

Hunter Bruin, a local artisan who makes elaborate creations from dried vines he collects from the woods, is at work on a basket near Fairmount Park. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER, METRO

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Top 3

What's trending at Metro.us

1 'VIDEO: Ron Jeremy takes on "Wrecking Ball"'

2 'VIDEO: Gosselin twins break silence on "The View"'

3 'VIDEO: Sasheer Zamata gives a "Girls" tour'

Quoted

"We had a particularly violent weekend."

Philadelphia Police Capt. James Clark, regarding the six homicides reported over a three-day period

'Persons of interest' held in NoLibs death

Random. Police Capt. James Clark believes the killing was random. "I believe these males saw them as easy targets," he said.

Two men — identified as "persons of interest" — were questioned Monday regarding the murder of a 26-year-old woman in Northern Liberties, police said.

Capt. James Clark said Monday that while there is not enough evidence to charge the two men with the murder of Amber Long, who was killed in front of her mother during an attempted robbery Sunday night, police will continue to collect evidence.

"Hopefully, we'll be able to make an arrest very shortly," he said.

Police on Monday were holding a house in Northwest Philadelphia, on the 5600 block of Camac Street, which the two men, who fit the descriptions of the attackers, were found.

Amber Long / FACEBOOK

According to police, Long, of the 1700 block of West Ritner Street, was walking with her 50-year-old mother along North Front Street Sunday night around 10:30 p.m.

They had just gotten off the El at Front and Spring Garden streets and were walking northbound on Front toward Long's car.

As mother and daughter approached the 900 block of Front Street, two men approached them. One snatched the mother's purse off her shoulder and ran. The second tried to take the purse from Amber, who put up a fight, police said. During the struggle, the attacker shot her in the chest. The purse was left behind.

Information

The city said any information is helpful.

- The city offers a $20,000 reward for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of a suspect in a homicide.
- Submit a tip via telephone at 215-686-TIPS or text a tip to PPD TIP or 773847.

TOMMY ROWAN
tommy.rowan@metro.us

See more at www.metro.us

Anti-gun violence rally hits close to home

City Councilman Kenyatta Johnson consoles Michelle Maddox, mother to Benjamin Collier, 29, who was shot to death on Friday, as she cries during a march against gun violence in Southwest Philadelphia Monday. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER, METRO

No bark. Killer known to Lawncrest murder victims, police say

Police said the double murder in Lawncrest Sunday was done "execution-style" and the killer was known to the victims.

On Sunday, Donna Muller, 49, and her 22-year-old son, Richard, were found dead on the second floor of their Northeast Philadelphia row home on the 300 block of Stevens Street with gunshot wounds to the back of the head, police said.

"It appears that it's personal. It appears that it was someone that they knew," Capt. James Clark said.

There was a dog inside that didn't attack or bark, Clark added. Muller's daughter found both of the bodies. Donna was in the hallway while Richard was in a bedroom.

No valuables were taken, and the house wasn't ransacked, he said. There doesn't appear to be a forced entry.

Police believe the double murder was committed between 10:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Sunday, and are asking any neighbors who might have seen any activity to contact police.

The city offers a $20,000 reward for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of a suspect in a homicide.

Anyone with information is asked to submit a tip via telephone at 215-686-TIPS or text a tip to PPD TIP or 773847.

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Gun sale

Police ID second suspect in school shooting

Police charged Donte Walker, 18, with firearms violations and conspiracy for allegedly selling the handgun that was used in a shooting

Raisheem Rochwell, left, and Donte Walker have been charged. / PPD

Friday that injured two students at Delaware Valley Charter High School.

Police say surveillance video shows Walker exchange a black handgun for cash to an as yet unidentified man, who then passed the weapon in the school's gym to Raisheem Rochwell, 17, who is charged with aggravated assault in the shooting.

Rochwell was apparently a target in a planned after-school brawl, "and may have requested the gun for that reason," police said.

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Snowstorm

Six to eight inches expected Tuesday

A big winter storm is expected to hit our area Tuesday and before it's over, up to 8 inches of snow is expected to fall.

Mitchell Gaines, with the National Weather Service in Mount Holly, said snow will develop late in the morning and "increase in intensity in the late afternoon and evening."

Temperatures will only reach the mid-20s, he said, and slick snow and ice spots are expected to form on the roadways.

Winds will increase to around 20 miles per hour late Tuesday night into Wednesday.

On Wednesday morning, wild chills are slated to be at or below zero.

CHRISTINA PACIOLLA

Fairmount 'grapewood' artisan's unlikely creations

See more at www.metro.us

Fruit of the vine. A grapevine weaver can be found peddling his unique wares across from the PMA.

Bruin works on a basket Monday afternoon near Fairmount Park. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER, METRO

It ain't Marcel Duchamp. But in Fairmount, a traveling artisan has recently found success selling masks, animals, chairs and wreaths made of grapevine.

Hunter Bruin, 54, made his first piece by threading grapevines together when he was 20, and it's been his calling ever since, he said.

"My philosophy of what I'm doing is I want to make something useful," Bruin said. "A person can see the integrity of the thing you made just by looking at it."

Bruin has spent decades making wreaths and baskets for sale to average folk, flower shops or other small businesses. Recently, he's been expanding his range to include items like a chair and a life-size dog.

What sets Bruin's work apart from typical woven-wood artisans, who mostly use oak to create wicker items, is that others use smooth, uniform strands of wicker. Bruin exclusively works with raw, unshaved grapevine. As it hardens, it becomes solid — what Bruin calls "grapewood."

"Grape is the woodiest of vines," Bruin said. "It's plentiful and strong."

Bruin lived in 15 states and Canada before coming here five years ago.

"I like to find things that people actually respond to," Bruin said. "And then, when they buy it, it tells me I need to make another one."

Heard it through the grapevine

Puzzled by the meaning of grapewood?

- Bruin collects grapevines, which are considered an invasive species. Park friends groups have thanked him for his efforts.
- Bruin will weave the vines together into the desired shape, sometimes adding bayberries, winterberries, birch-bark backings and other decorative touches.
- Over time, the vines harden into their woven shape — becoming tough, like wood. Voila! Grapewood is born.

SAM NEWHOUSE
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Truth? US officials confirm Marine's body was autopsied

U.S. Sen. Patrick Toomey recently obtained a report from the former ambassador to Greece confirming that a Coatesville Marine's body was illegally autopsied after his death while stationed at the Athens embassy.

But parents Craig and Beverly LaLoup still don't understand why their son, U.S. Marine Sgt. Brian LaLoup, had his heart taken out.

"How is any of this acceptable? How can an American Marine be treated in this fashion?" they wrote in response.

Former Ambassador to Greece Daniel Bennett Smith said through Sen. Toomey that he made every effort to prevent an autopsy and filed numerous complaints with the Greek government, before and after the autopsy took place.

Despite his efforts, he said, the Greeks went ahead with an autopsy, violating the Vienna Convention.

"I remain deeply saddened by the tragic death of Sgt. LaLoup and the subsequent events regarding his heart," Smith wrote in the letter.

The Greek embassy in Washington did not respond to calls for comment. **SAM NEWHOUSE**

Timeline

- **Aug. 12, 2012** - LaLoup commits suicide.
- **Aug. 13** — Smith tells authorities not to autopsy LaLoup's body.
- **Aug. 18** — Greeks do autopsy, remove heart for unknown reasons.
- **Sept. 20** — Smith asks for investigation.

MLK's legacy is alive

Ishanaye Johnson, 7, with the help of Cristhian Varela, right, makes a claymation stop-motion video honoring the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at The Clay Studio in Old City on Monday. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER, METRO

19. Cop's teenage son, aspiring boxer, killed on his house steps

The 19-year-old Southwest Philadelphia man who was killed Friday was identified Monday as an aspiring boxer and the son of a Philadelphia police officer.

Jahmeer Jett, of the 6200 block of Grays Avenue, was shot multiple times as he ran home around 6 p.m., said police. He was only a few feet from his front door, they added.

Capt. James Clark said Jett was on his way home when an unidentified male ran up behind him and fired several shots into his back before running away.

"The police officer's son is not known to police at all," Clark said, meaning Jett had a clean record. "He was a really good kid. He worked, and was also a part-time boxer, aspiring to be a professional fighter."

"He's never been in trouble a day in his life," he added. **TOMMY ROWAN**

Crash

Woman critical after hit and run in Bristol

A hit-and-run accident happened about 3:30 a.m. on Bristol Pike near Sixth Avenue, reports say. The 41-year-old woman had just left a grocery store and was crossing the street when she was struck. The woman is in critical condition at Aria Health-Torresdale. **METRO**

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Civil rights

What would MLK champion in 2014?

Visions of what Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. would do to promote civil rights in 2014, had he not been slain decades ago, marked speeches and commemorations held across the country to honor his memory on Monday.

Recalling King's famous "I Have a Dream," speech, Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed said the late civil rights leader would want school children to hear it as a call to stay in school and become educated to better the world.

"We need to swap the lesson plan for a dream plan," Reed told a crowd at Ebenezer Baptist Church gathered for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day federal holiday.

He said King would want children to hear: "You are not going to school just to study math, you're going to school to be somebody."

In New York City, newly elected Mayor Bill de Blasio, swept into office promising broader opportunities for poorer residents, said at a tribute: "Dr. King would tell us we can't wait" to bring income equality to New Yorkers.

At the packed Atlanta church near the Martin Luther King Center, which promotes his philosophy of non-violence, King's daughter Bernice was applauded for her call to honor his message by making Monday a "no shots fired" day in the wake of school shootings and other gun violence across the nation. **REUTERS**

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
GETTY IMAGES

Christie No. 2 denies linking Sandy funds to development

Allegation. The mayor first made her accusations on MSNBC on Saturday.

New Jersey's lieutenant governor on Monday denied a claim by the mayor of Hoboken that Gov. Chris Christie's administration linked the release of superstorm Sandy relief funds to approval of a Hoboken development project.

Hoboken Mayor Dawn Zimmer says Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno warned her that Christie would withhold disaster recovery funding if Zimmer did not support a bid by the New York-based Rockefeller Group to build on several blocks in Hoboken.

His spokesman has dismissed the Hoboken mayor's claims as false, as did Guadagno on Monday at a public appearance in Union Beach, N.J.

Blaine Badick and her fiancee Andrew Grapsas cross a flooded street with their dog while leaving their home after Hurricane Sandy on Oct. 31, 2012, in Hoboken, N.J. / GETTY IMAGES

Quoted

"I stand by my word, remain willing to testify under oath, and I will continue to answer any questions asked of me by the U.S. Attorney's Office." Zimmer

"Mayor Zimmer's version of our conversation in May of 2013 is not only false but is illogical and does not withstand scrutiny when all of the facts are examined," Guadagno said.

"Any suggestion that Sandy funds were tied to the approval of any project in New Jersey is completely false," she said, adding, "Being a Sandy victim myself makes the mayor's allegations particularly offensive to me."

In response, the Hoboken mayor said she was "genuinely disappointed" that Christie's second-in-command "would deny linking Hoboken's application for Sandy hazard mitigation funding with expediting a private development project." **REUTERS**

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Media. Missionary jailed in North Korea wants US to help him

A U.S. missionary imprisoned in North Korea for more than a year appeared in front of journalists on Monday, in prison clothes and under guard, asking Washington to help him get home, foreign media there reported.

Kenneth Bae, a 45-year-old ethnic Korean, was arrested as he led a tour group in North Korea in 2012 and sentenced to 15 years of hard labor on charges of state subversion.

Bae met "a limited number of media outlets" in the North Korean capital Pyongyang and expressed hope of the United States securing his release, Japan's Kyodo news agency reported.

Bae's son Jonathan urged Washington to respond to the statement. REUTERS

Search continues

NC man missing after Grand Cayman dive

Grand Cayman authorities were searching on Monday for a U.S. tourist who disappeared after scuba diving near Seven Mile Beach, a popular dive site on the island's northwest tip.

David Byles, 57, of Pinehurst, N.C., surfaced from a group dive on Sunday with his wife, but vanished as the couple was swimming about 100 yards to the boat, according to Royal Cayman Islands Police Service Marine Command Ian Yearwood. REUTERS

Tickets are a hot item for chilly NY-area Super Bowl

Seattle Seahawks fans hold up signs for Super Bowl XLVIII but they will have to pay a hefty price if they plan to attend. / GETTY IMAGES

Quoted

"Everything leading up to the game is what the whole experience is about."

Lance Patania told New Jersey's Star Ledger newspaper

Super cost. Face value of individual tickets ranges from $1,000-$2,600.

Tickets to the National Football League's first cold-weather Super Bowl are a hot item, with some climate-controlled suites in New Jersey's MetLife Stadium priced at $1 million.

Following Sunday's conference championships that set up a Denver-Seattle Super Bowl on Feb. 2, the average resale price of tickets on secondary markets was $3,721, the highest figure in five years of tracking, according to SeatGeek (Seatgeek.com).

No single ticket on the secondary market had sold for under $2,000, a price that was 33 percent more than what the cheapest ticket sold for on conference championship Sunday during each of the past three NFL playoffs, the website said.

Face value of individual Super Bowl tickets ranges from $1,000-$2,600.

For high-rollers, one suite on the Commissioner's Level of MetLife Stadium, the shared home of the New York Giants and New York Jets, is listed for $1.019 million. The same luxury suite for an entire Giants or Jets regular season sells for $350,000.

There were more than 12,000 tickets listed on secondary markets as of late Sunday, representing roughly 15 percent of the capacity at MetLife Stadium.

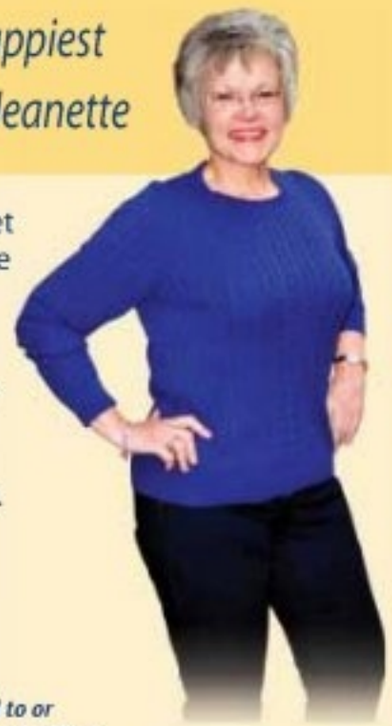
Ticket broker Lance Patania told New Jersey's Star Ledger newspaper that he expected a busy market immediately following the conference title games as fans of the winning teams react. REUTERS

Let your

New Year's Resolution be a Long-term Weight Loss Solution

For years, I would begin each day telling myself, *"Today is the day I start my diet,"* and I would end each day berating myself over my lack of self-control with food. I would always assure myself by saying *"I will do better tomorrow,"* but tomorrow never came, and I continued in a downward spiral! Plagued with hypertension, high cholesterol, sleep apnea, acid reflux disease, and an A1C value that had me knocking on diabetes' doorstep, I carried my weight with a smile – but behind that smile was genuine suffering.

"4 years and 86 lbs. after surgery, and I am the happiest and healthiest I have been in years!" – Jeanette



After gaining weight to the tune of 264 pounds, I decided to get real about my issues with food and my weight! I contacted the ***Center for Surgical Weight Loss*** at Hahnemann University Hospital and I never looked back.

Surgery was only the first step in my weight loss journey. I continue to renew my commitment daily by making proper food choices, exercising, and leading an active lifestyle. In fact, shortly after surgery, I took up Zumba. I loved it so much I have became a certified Zumba instructor!

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Mayor of San Antonio, Texas and
Ms. Sherrilyn Ifill
President and Director-Counsel of the
NAACP Legal Defense and
Educational Fund, Inc.

moderated by
Dr. Anthea Butler
Associate Professor of
Religious Studies and
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A San Antonio native, **Mayor Julián Castro** is the youngest mayor of a Top 50 American city. His inspiring keynote address at the 2012 Democratic National Convention shared part of his remarkable, uniquely American personal story. Under his leadership, the city of San Antonio, Texas has undergone a revitalization that has positioned the city as a brainpower community. *TIME Magazine* placed Mayor Castro on its "40 under 40" list of rising stars in American politics.

Sherrilyn Ifill is the seventh President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. Among her successful litigations is the landmark Voting Rights Act case *Houston Lawyers' Association vs. Attorney General of Texas.* A critically acclaimed author, her book *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the 21st Century* reflects her lifelong engagement in and analysis of issues of race and American public life.

Anthea Butler is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and Graduate Chair of Religious Studies. She is the author of *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making A Sanctified World.* Professor Butler is a regular contributor to the news magazines on several media outlets, including CNN, MSNBC, and The Canadian Broadcasting Company, and is a regular guest on the Melissa *Harris-Perry* show.

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Christian Bale and Jeremy Renner are seen filming David O. Russell's "American Hustle" on May 18, 2013, in New York City. / GETTY IMAGES

The real 'American Hustle'

Abscam. The FBI sting that inspired the Oscar-nominated movie.

If you haven't seen "American Hustle," you should soon: the Golden Globe-winning film is expected to take home several Oscars.

Robert Del Tufo, the U.S. attorney who prosecuted Abscam — code name for the case the movie is loosely based on — recently shared his reaction to the film and the real man on which the character Irving Rosenfeld was based.

"Mel Weinberg, even at age 90, has a great ability to make money off people," Del Tufo said.

Weinberg was a fraudster caught by the FBI who, in order to evade a prison sentence, agreed to cooperate with the Bureau.

Weinberg and his FBI partners started by doing "small things, like stolen property," explained John Good, the FBI agent who led Abscam, and quickly recognized Weinberg's potential though his many shady dealings.

As the dealings progressed, Good and his team began crossing paths with corrupt politicians, not just in New Jersey but in Washington, D.C., as well.

In an operation more creative than most Hollywood scriptwriters could generate, an agent posing as Karim Abdul Rahman, a fictitious sheikh, offered the lawmakers cash in return for political favors.

"Mel was a magnificent con artist," explains Good. "He had this amazing ability to trick people. He tried to trick us, too, but when he realized that he couldn't, he really got into the case. It was the first thing he'd ever done on the side of the law."

The FBI's plan worked. Of the 31 politicians targeted, seven accepted the bribe and were later convicted for the crime, as were five other government officials.

Who's who

- **Mel Weinberg:** fraudster, FBI informant
- **John Good:** FBI agent in charge of team
- **Tony Amoroso:** FBI agent posing undercover
- **Robert Del Tufo:** Prosecutor

ELISABETH BRAW
elisabeth.braw@metro.lu

Abscam

Abscam was an FBI sting operation started in 1978 that investigated in corruption of U.S. officials. The FBI used convicted con Melvin Weinberg to weed out the officials.

- **How it happened:** In order to entrap officials, the FBI formed a fake company called Abdul Enterprises Ltd., as a front for the investigation, and set up videotaped meetings between a fake Arab sheikh named Abdul Rahman (played by an FBI agent) and officials.
- **Result:** The sting operation led to the conviction of a U.S. senator, six members of Congress, and other officials.
- **Controversy:** One government lawyer was reported as saying it was "a scam within a scam," and violated Justice Department guidelines for undercover operations, including paying Weinberg $150,000 for his role.
- **Movie material:** In 1982 director Louis Malle was making plans for an Abscam movie called "Moon Over Miami" starring Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi. Belushi was to play Mel Weinberg, based on the same man as Bale's character in "American Hustle". The project was canceled after Belushi died later that year. This year's Oscar favorite "American Hustle", starring Christian Bale, Amy Adams, Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence, is loosely based on the sting operation.

Tips for beginner investors to try

Personal finance. Thinking about investing? You don't need to be an expert to start.

Entering the stock market can feel overwhelming, but if you're looking for a way to grow your money, it's a better option than sticking it in a bank account. Saving is still an important long- and short-term strategy, but investing is a great way to supplement your financial future.

"If you put all your money into a savings account, you're going to earn very low interest. Whereas if you take that money and put it in a stock/mutual fund instead, you're going to see a return that's much higher and faster," says Debra Borchart, a market analyst at TheStreet.com.

And the good news is you don't need to have a lot of money saved to start. "There's no magic number to start with, but you can do it for as little as $50," says Borchart. "People think you have to have thousands of dollars saved up to invest, but you really don't. The way you do it is you start small and build it up."

As with anything that involves the stock market, there is always risk, but Borchart says the key is not to make emotional decisions and riding it out for the long haul. "In the long run, most people do well in the market. It's when you jump in and out when you hurt yourself," she says.

Quoted

"There's no magic number to start with, but you can do it for as little as $50."

Debra Borchart, market analyst

When you're ready to start investing, the first step is to educate yourself. Sites like Investopedia.com break it down and put everything into layman's terms. It isn't even necessary to meet with a financial adviser. "I think sometimes that intimidates people," Borchart says. Her advice is to use an investing app instead, like Motif Investing or SigFig, which are preferred by the editors at Money magazine.

Once you have taken these initial steps to invest, check up on your stocks about every six months. Then, you can see how they're doing and if you are able and want to invest more money, you can.

The most important thing when you're considering investing is not to be intimidated. Even if you know very little about the stock market, you can still make a profit.

EMILY LAURENCE
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Mark Butler is the director of outreach for www.youneedabudget.com. Send him your personal finance questions at emily.laurence@metro.us.

THE TRICK TO NEVER HAVING BUYER'S REMORSE

Let's get something straight. A budget doesn't tell you what you can't do — it tells you what you'd rather do. Anyone who took Econ 101 has heard the term "opportunity cost." Definitions may vary, but the concept of opportunity cost tells us that the real cost of something is the value of whatever we didn't buy in order to purchase it.

Here's one real-world example: The actual cost of your $399 iPad isn't $399. The actual cost of the iPad is what you gave up when you bought it, like 20 $20 meals or two (maybe three) pairs of fancy-ish shoes.

The power of a budget is not to keep you from buying something; it just shows you exactly what you chose not to buy when you put a new item in the shopping cart.

If you want to avoid buyer's remorse (and credit card debt), get an effective budget on your side. Budgeting apps, like Level, can be really helpful in showing where your money is going and planning where you want it to go. There are different categories, such as gadgets, food and drink or shopping, and you can allot certain amounts of money into each category. Then, when you're in the Apple store debating buying that iPad mini, you can look at the app and see how much money you have saved in your gadgets category. An effective budget isn't arbitrarily saying you can't or shouldn't spend. It just clarifies what the purchase requires you to sacrifice.

In either case, you win. Your budget gave you good information, and you acted on it. That's money-management bliss, and that's why you need a budget.

Before you make a purchase, take a second to think about what you might be giving up. / COLOURBOX

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Come on, get happy

Smile. Keep these positive thinking habits this semester.

Amid endless assignments, looming deadlines and stress, college life isn't all a bowl of cherries — especially as the winter break recedes into the past. January is a time when students often struggle with the blues, but the up-and-coming curriculum of positive psychology is making its mark.

Just ask Stella Grizont, founder of well-being learning company WOOPAAH and instructor of "The Science of Happiness" at the online learning company Udemy.com. Grizont earned her master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania and points out the new science understands what makes life worth living from an empirical evidence-based perspective. She says that positive psychology focuses on what's right with people and "how to go from zero to 10-plus."

The relatively new field dives into theory and application with classes like "Approaches to the Good Life" and "Applied Positive Interventions." Grizont learned that exuding positive emotions and experiencing a generally high level of life satisfaction have a huge impact on one's life span. Get this — you're twice as likely to be alive after 65 if you're happy versus unhappy, you're three times more creative on the job and 30 percent more productive at work. "In fact, people even think you're hotter," she dishes.

And it's not about trying to be happy all the time either. According to Tal Ben-Shahar, best-selling author of "Choose the Life You Want," a person can endure emotional pain at times and still be happy overall in the sense of an "overall experience of pleasure and meaning."

Boosting your happiness is a matter of dedicating yourself to it.
WAVEBREAK MEDIA

Recognizing that happy people enjoy positive emotions while perceiving their lives as purposeful, Ben-Shahar says it's critical for students to give themselves permission to have feelings. Instead of ignoring them, uncomfortable emotions should rise to the surface. "Allowing ourselves to experience emotions such as envy or anger or fear or sadness is central to a happy and fulfilling life."

Not only should students acknowledge emotions, they should slow down and simplify daily life. Ben-Shahar, a former Harvard professor of positive psychology, says we're generally too busy trying to squeeze in more and more activities into less and less time. He adds it's OK to not check emails for a few hours and it's OK to not have a phone on 24/7. "Doing less instead of more unlocks the key to happiness. We are in a better position to enjoy the treasures of happiness that are inside us and around us."

Such treasures, he says, can be found by focusing on the positive and expressing gratitude, whether it's by keeping a regular gratitude journal, meditating or praying. "We too often take the positive elements of our lives for granted. We have to learn to appreciate and savor the wonderful things in life, from people to food, from nature to a smile."

Smile guide

Four keys to building happiness habits:

1 Celebrate Thanksgiving today. "Appreciate three things that are going right in your life right now and write them down. Do this daily," explains Grizont.

2 Prioritize people. Spend time with or call those you love to tell them you care; research finds that relationships drive happiness.

3 Work your strengths. Identify your top strength and find one new way to apply it. She notes, "Researchers found this can decrease depression."

4 Do three nice deeds daily. It's not just enough to be kind every once in a while; Grizont says studies reveal the benefits of doing good rubs off when you're at it several times a day. Hold the door open, give a compliment, offer a helping hand.

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CULTURE

Twitter feed

Today, Joss Whedon is filled with regret, Chloe Moretz is starting to doubt reality TV and Carrie Underwood loves getting recognized.

@josswhedon: How do you undelete a tweet? Also, how do you undo most of your adult life?

@ChloeGMoretz: Wait I'm watching the new keeping up with the kardashians and Khloe's sunglasses just changed back and forth in the last 2 seconds...

@carrieunderwood: Nice lady checking me out at the grocery store: "Anybody ever tell you that you look like Keri Hilson?" Me: "No."

Blue Ivy Carter visited Sunny Obama

The world's most famous toddler meets the world's most famous dog. / TUMBLR

The great thing about 2-year-olds is that glamour doesn't exist for them. Sure, it's great for a baby if her parents are huge pop stars who hobnob at the White House, but the No. 1 item on her agenda is still "Doggy doggy doggy doggy doggy."

Beyonce visited said White House this weekend to perform for Michelle Obama's 50th birthday, and she brought husband Jay Z and their daughter Blue Ivy along for the ride. Blue, clad in cat ears and an adorable white tulle gown that I would have murdered for when I was little, got to check out the White House Christmas tree and watch her mom perform, according to the sweet photos posted on her mama's Tumblr.

But could any of that compare to the sublime fuzziness of the Obama's newest Portuguese water dog, Sunny? Beyonce posted several blurry but adorable snaps of Sunny and Blue making friends. Maybe, instead of renting out a zoo and buying her a miniature Porsche for her second birthday last week, Jay and B should just have gotten Blue a puppy.

MELINDA TAUB

THE WORD

Dorothy Robinson takes on the world of gossip

DOROTHY ROBINSON
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dorothy.robinson@metro.us

What Depp's midlife crisis looks like

If I were Vanessa Paradis, I wouldn't be too pleased.

While Johnny Depp shared 14 years — and two children — with Paradis, he always maintained marriage wasn't that important to him. "I never found myself needing that piece of paper," he told Extra in 2010. Apparently he's changed his tune, as Depp, 50, has reportedly proposed to girlfriend Amber Heard, 27, according to People magazine. "They couldn't be happier to be engaged and excited to share the rest of their lives together," a source says. Depp and Heard, who met while filming "The Rum Diary," went public as a couple shortly after he split from Paradis in 2012.

Way to have a midlife crisis, Depp, and get married to a woman 23 years your junior. What's next — a sports car? Hair plugs? More exotic man-jewelry?

GETTY IMAGES

Emma Thompson photobombs Lupita Nyong'o

Emma Thompson is setting herself up to be the best part of this year's awards season. After drinking a martini onstage and throwing her heels over her shoulder at the Golden Globe Awards, the actress ruled at yet another event, Saturday's SAG Awards when she photobombed "12 Years a Slave" actress Lupita Nyong'o while on the red carpet. Keep the martinis coming, Thompson!

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GARY SHTEYNGART

Novelist's new book is called "Little Failure," but his own reinvention is far from it.

BIG SUCCESSES

Novelist Gary Shteyngart introduced his new memoir, "Little Failure" in a big way: with a book trailer starring James Franco, Rashida Jones and fellow author Jonathan Franzen. The trailer was a big hit, and the memoir itself has been receiving rave reviews. The author of 2010's celebrated "Super Sad True Love Story" took some time to answer a few questions about his Hollywood connections, the relative aging rate of Russian men and what it's like to reinvent yourself as an American.

How did your book trailer with James Franco come about?
Well, he was a student of mine, and I thought it would be nice to make out with him for a while on camera. I mean, it's a dream that many people of all sexual orientations have, and he was kind enough to say 'yeah, I'll wear the bathrobe.' There were many, many takes on this, and then we finally settled on one that was pretty sexy I thought.

You were forced to make out with him over and over again.
Let's say he was forced to make out with me. For me, it was pure pleasure.

I thought Franzen looked really relaxed and natural on-screen.
He's a natural! I think he's probably had a little acting, in college or something, because he was great.

Will James Franco be appearing in all of your book trailers?
He appeared in [a previous] one I did. I did one with Paul Giamatti. I love to work with actors who can make my neuroses come alive on the screen.

What made you decide to write a memoir?
It was time. I'm 41, and in Russian years that's 67. How much more time do I have left? I had a kid of my own and I thought it would be nice to figure out what my upbringing was like, so I don't [repeat mistakes] but also keep the humor and love. I feel like I've been working on this material for a long time and I want to use it so I can move on to other stuff that maybe doesn't involve as many Russian Jews.

There's a lot of reinvention that's happening along the way.
That, I think, is native to my other novels. There's always the sense of reinvention that people undergo, or suffer, if you want to put it another way. No one is ever happy with being who they are. But that's a great trope in writing fiction, in general. That's the question: If you have people who are static, then why write about them?

LISA WEIDENFELD
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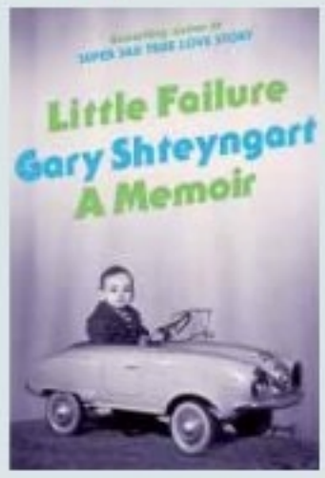
Q&A



While you were writing the memoir, was it ever hard to decide which stories made sense as a part of the general narrative?
I woke up every morning and before writing thought, I'm 9 years old. What's the world going to look like for me today? ... There were periods of my life that I felt were real triumphs. I discovered Manhattan and went from being a provincial Yeshiva boy to a kind of worldly Manhattanite, but even that transition was very difficult. It required a loss of a lot of things that I loved.

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"My similarities with the main character made it easier for me to see our differences," Chen says. / SARAH DERAGON

'Soy Sauce for Beginners' is simply delicious

Novel. Author Kirstin Chen tells us how this overlooked condiment became a central idea in her new book.

Kirstin Chen's new novel, about a woman named Gretchen who flees her failed marriage in San Francisco to return home to Singapore, is actually about a lot of things. It's about reinventing yourself at 30. It's about realizing your parents' faults. It's about the meaning of home. But it's also about soy sauce. Gretchen's family owns an artisan soy sauce business, and Chen's flavorful prose will have you thinking about the common condiment in a whole new way.

"I knew I wanted it to be a family business and something that was ubiquitous in Asia, but I picked soy sauce without knowing anything about it," Chen says. "I thought it would be mundane but the instant I typed 'soy sauce' into Wikipedia, I realized I had something much bigger on my hands."

Through her research, Chen discovered that real soy sauce is made similarly to wine: It's aged for months and has a variety of notes. She even visited a family-owned soy sauce factory in Singapore, where she met a young woman eerily similar to her novel's principal character. Like Gretchen, she was the great-granddaughter of the founder and had just started working in the factory.

She also showed Chen one of the more striking rituals in the book: a concoction of soy sauce and Sprite. "She told me at the end of every tour, her grandfather would give guests soy sauce and Sprite, so I stole that directly from her and used it in the book," Chen says.

Like her novel's character, Chen is from Singapore and lives in San Francisco. "One of the paradoxes of Singapore is that it's encouraged to get the best education abroad, but conversely, we're all encouraged to come home and start families," Chen explains. A big theme in "Soy Sauce for Beginners" is stacking what your parents want for you against what you want for yourself — something everyone can relate to.

Making matters more complicated, Gretchen's mother's hidden alcohol problem is finally exposed. How can you help your family when your own life is in shambles? It's just another one of the questions the book explores.

A hot new love interest, competition between friends and all the complications that come with working at a family business keep readers hungry for more, making the book easy to devour in days.

EMILY LAURENCE
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Quoted

"I knew I wanted it to be a family business and something that was ubiquitous in Asia, but I picked soy sauce without knowing anything about it. I thought it would be mundane but the instant I typed 'soy sauce' into Wikipedia, I realized I had something much bigger on my hands." Chen

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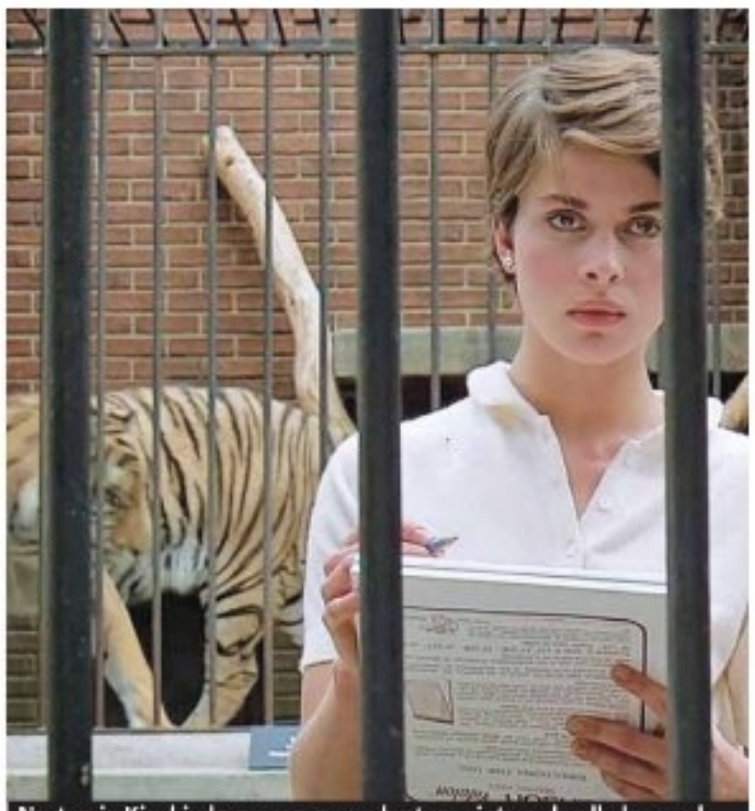
THE 'CAT PEOPLE' REMAKE REMAINS THE CRAZIEST HOLLYWOOD FILM ABOUT SEX


Nastassja Kinski plays a woman who turns into a deadly leopard when she has sex in "Cat People." / SHOUT! FACTORY

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Jerry Bruckheimer has long been associated with mega-testosterone man's man movies that blow stuff up real good: "Top Gun," multiple Michael Bay productions and endless "Pirate of the Caribbean" films. But sometimes people start off meaning well. Early into his career, the producer did up Michael Mann's "Thief" and brought Paul Schrader ever so briefly into the mainstream, first with "American Gigolo," then with 1982's "Cat People," one of the most messed-up films ever released by a major studio.

Nastassja Kinski plays a young woman of ambiguously European roots who believes if she has sex she will turn into a rampaging leopard. Her condition puts a cramp on her hesitant romance with a nice zoologist (John Heard). But at least she's more into him than her brother (Malcolm McDowell), who claims that not only does their lineage mean they can only have sex with each other, but they will die if they don't. Repeat: This is a movie where a man will die if he doesn't bang his sister.

"Cat People" wasn't a hit, and a year later Bruckheimer broke into the big time with "Flashdance," but "Cat People," by contrast, has loads going on underneath the frequent nudity and crazy sex.

DISC JOCKEY
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Sail on, sailor

'Captain Phillips'

Director Paul Greengrass and Tom Hanks were dissed for their amazing efforts on this film. An impromptu bit that wasn't in the script may even be the best work of Hanks' career.

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Beauty. Pamper all your senses at LUSH's new retreat.

You have the spa routine down: Change into a robe and sip herbal tea in a chic, minimally decorated waiting room before your therapist performs a much needed deep-tissue massage. However, this is not how it's going to go down at the new LUSH spa.

The British cosmetics brand opened its first U.S. spa locations in New York and Philadelphia last week, and aims to give clients a unique experience.

"It's quite different from any other spa," says co-founder Rowena Bird. "It's the amount of thought that's put into each treatment."

Right from the start, guests entering the flagship stores know they are in for an unusual treat. They first walk through a playland-style shop filled with the brightly colored bath bombs and handmade soaps the brand is known for. But upstairs in the spa, things quiet down.

Designed to resemble a home in the idyllic Dorset countryside, each room is meticulously fashioned with jars of wildflowers, sweet vintage teacups and old books. In the main waiting area is a board with words such as "energized" and "at peace" — "behavioral prescriptions" created by behavioral therapist Lady Helen Kennedy, who worked with the founders on capturing these moods.

For the spa's signature treatment, Synesthesia, an intertwining of the senses, clients pick a mood they'd like to feel from the board and that dictates everything in the massage, from the color of the room to the scents used. The music, composed by folk artist Simon Emmerson, is also tailored to achieve guests' feeling of choice.

TINA CHADHA
tina.chadha@metro.us

The LUSH spa (www.lushusa.com) is located at 1525 Walnut St.

LUSH

PLUS

Quoted

"There is a little bit of magic at the beginning and the end; it's always something special. There's a little twist that you wouldn't expect and that makes you smile. So when you come out, we have picked you up and put you into a different space."

Rowena Bird, co-founder

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Social media travel secrets

Deals. "Hotel Impossible" star Anthony Melchiorri fills us in.

CASSANDRA GARRISON
cassandra.garrison@metro.us

There are countless ways to save money on hotel rooms these days, but if you're not looking on Facebook and Twitter, you're missing out.

Expert hotel fixer and host of Travel Channel's "Hotel Impossible" Anthony Melchiorri says that more hotels are turning to their social media accounts to sell last-minute rooms or offer freebies publicly to showcase their customer service.

It's the savvy ones who get them first, so read on to learn how to scoop up those digital deals.

Season four of "Hotel Impossible" premiers Jan. 27 at 10 p.m. on Travel Channel. / TRAVEL CHANNEL

1 If you're not already following hotels and airlines on Facebook and Twitter, you should be. "No one buys hotel rooms on social media, but it is a platform. A lot of them post good deals they allow you to claim on their website," Melchiorri says. "You 'like' them because they may have special deals. If they have a promotion, you can be part of that."

2 Don't sit back and wait — make the first move. "I always tell guests or friends to go on social media, let them know you are coming, look for a deal," Melchiorri recommends. "By letting them know you are coming, it allows you a free upgrade potential, so it's a great way to engage them immediately, and too many take it for granted."

When all else fails

Pick up the phone

"The old-fashioned way is the best way," Melchiorri advises. "Call the hotel, get a human being on the phone. If you call me, I am going to take care of you, because that is kind of what I was born to do. People who work at hotels like people. They like talking to people."

3 Practice fast-finger shopping. "I think speed is a main factor; it's gotta be fast," he says. "A lot of hotels don't do it well — you might not get an answer for two days — but you should."

4 Look for last-minute deals. "If a hotel was doing Facebook and Twitter right and they had last-minute deals, they might do $99 for tonight," Melchiorri says. "They are dumping inventory at the end of the night or the day before, and they can really drive a lot of business. You will see last-minute deals that no one else can get."

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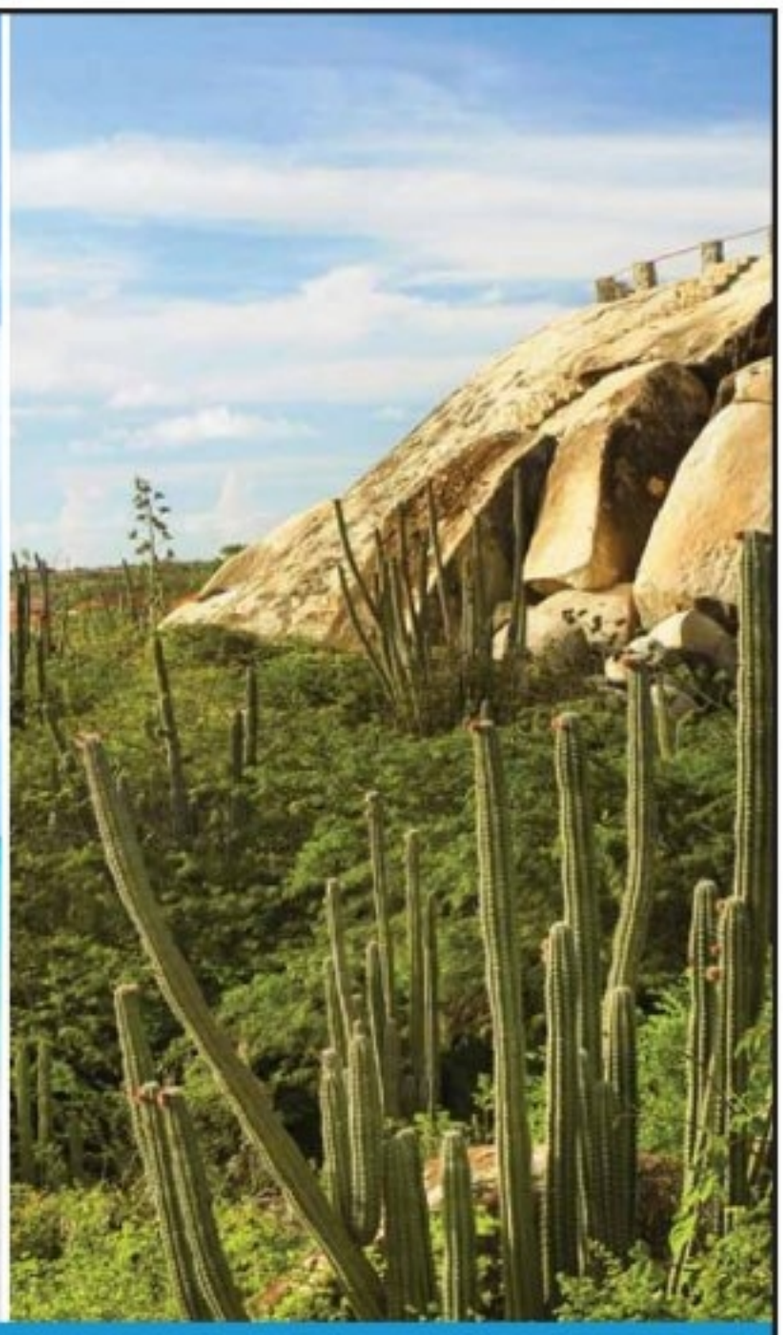

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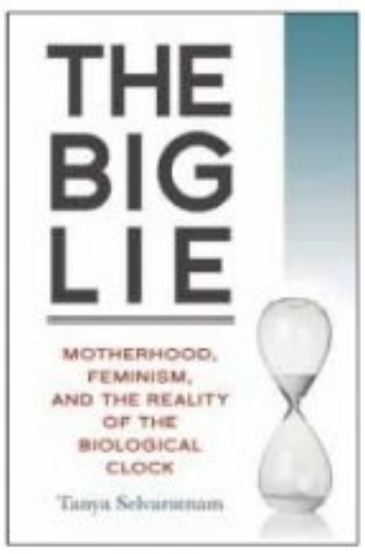
Tick-tock, tick-tock

Fertility. In her book "The Big Lie," Tanya Selvaratnam warns about the consequences of waiting to start a family.

"Educate yourself; don't be dependent on others to educate you," says author Tanya Selvaratnam.
CHIARA CLEMENTE

We know the nursery rhyme: "First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage." But for the modern woman, it's a bit different. Our nursery rhyme goes a bit more like: "First comes education, then a graduate degree, toss in some exotic travel, a high-powered job, financial security — then love, marriage and a baby."

However, as Tanya Selvaratnam writes in her new book, "The Big Lie: Motherhood, Feminism, and the Reality of the Biological Clock," that happy ending — a baby in a baby carriage — isn't necessarily a given.



"Biology doesn't bend to feminist principles, and science cannot work miracles," notes the Harvard-educated Selvaratnam. "Women cannot do things on our own timetables. People think that because of advances in reproductive science and modern technology, we can actually control the biological clock to our advantage."

Selvaratnam made that mistake. She figured that she could fulfill her creative ambitions before starting a family. After enduring three miscarriages, several IVF treatments and then the dissolution of her marriage, she realized she had waited too long. And so, "The Big Lie" began to take shape. In the book, Selvaratnam combines her own struggle with medical statistics and the latest research to help a new generation of women to be more informed about their fertility.

"I'm putting myself out there so people have something to hold onto while grappling with the numerous studies and statistics that I put forward in the book."

"The Big Lie" is also a call to action for women. Late in the book, Selvaratnam includes a well-researched chapter entitled "Action Items for the Future," so that women are better prepared and more aware of their options. "It's really about preparing yourself for many possible outcomes so that if the one you hope for doesn't pan out, you don't suffer."

DOROTHY ROBINSON
dorothy.robinson@metro.us

Quoted

"Biology doesn't bend to feminist principles, and science cannot work miracles." Selvaratnam

A few of Selvaratnam's Action Items for the Future

If you are 21 or younger

- **Drop the bad boy habit.** If you want to have children with a partner, be open to someone who will be a good parent.
- **Monitor your health.** If you are ready to get pregnant, pay extra attention to your weight and nutrition.
- **Educate yourself.** Two great books are "Taking Care of Your Fertility" and "Fully Fertile."

If you are between the ages of 21 and 30:

- **Find out the fertility basics.** The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has great fact sheets you can download that are very user-friendly and visual.
- **Take care of your body.** You should be aware that what you do now can affect your future chances of having a child.
- **Think about your goals.** As you approach your late 20s, start pursuing options for conserving your fertility, if you haven't had a child yet.

If you are 30 or older

- **Consult a specialist.** If you are above 35 years old and have trouble getting pregnant or have had a miscarriage, get yourself to a fertility specialist sooner than even your OB/GYN might advise.
- **Read up.** If you are dealing with infertility, educate yourself. A good resource is the book "Budgeting for Infertility."
- **Expand your options.** If you have not had a child by 40, despite treatment, start considering other options, like egg donation and surrogacy. Think especially about adoption. And be proud to do so!

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Horoscope

♒ Aquarius | Jan. 21-Feb 18. If you stay informed and talk your way through complications, you'll be able to find solutions to whatever you face.

♓ Pisces | Feb. 19-March 20. If you are feeling run-down, allow yourself some time to rejuvenate. You can start a business partnership with a person who will add value to a project.

♈ Aries | March 21-April 20. Don't be overcome by fits of anger. Focus on accomplishing reasonable things that will lead to personal satisfaction.

♉ Taurus | April 21-May 21. You'll have momentum and should be able to complete your agenda. Creativity will lead to all sorts of new projects.

♊ Gemini | May 22-June 20. You may need to walk on eggshells, or you could end up in an argument with someone at home. Hold off on talks until late in the day.

♋ Cancer | June 21-July 22. Heed the advice of others and you will discover all sorts of salient details. A relationship can thrive if you put in the hours.

♌ Leo | July 23-Aug. 22. Learn from experience, especially when there is money involved. You can improve your financial future.

♍ Virgo | Aug. 23-Sept. 22. If you refuse to compromise, you will jeopardize a partnership. You may want to take on fewer projects. It's preferable to do one thing well.

♎ Libra | Sept. 23-Oct. 22. If you avoid procrastinating, you'll find success. Investments could shape the year ahead for you. Indecision is your enemy.

♏ Scorpio | Oct. 23-Nov. 21. Someone is likely to enchant you today. Relationships can become magical, intense and exciting.

♐ Sagittarius | Nov. 22-Dec. 21. Embellishing the truth will get you into trouble, so be honest. Lies will come back to haunt you. Do what you can to dispel any clouds.

♑ Capricorn | Dec. 22-Jan 20. Focus on what you wish to accomplish, and get things moving promptly. Disputes will escalate later in the day.

BERNICE BEDE OSOL

Sudoku: Easy and hard

	1	7	5					
	5	8		1	3			
			6			8	1	
		2			5	9		
9			3		7			8
		5	1			3		
	8	9			6			
			2	9		4	8	
					4	6	3	

7	4							
		2	3	4			5	9
		5		2	6			
	1	9					6	
3			9		8			1
	7					9	3	
			6	7		8		
4	2			8	9	3		
							4	6

How to play
Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved. You solve the puzzle with reasoning and logic.

Letters

Raising our standards

Re: 'Follow the money' (Metro, Jan. 16) Letter writer David Snieckus points to the Federal Reserve. However, this system did work until President Franklin Delano Roosevelt removed the gold backing from each dollar. Kennedy decoupled the silver as a reserve supporting the dollar and then President Lyndon Johnson did away with silver coins by signing the 1965 Coinage Act — an act that had gone unchanged since 1792. Today the money has value, but ask yourself: Would you prefer a pocket with coinage of real value or a pocket with bonded alloys of aluminum and copper? And never let someone tell you this doesn't matter. MICHAEL TREACY, VIA EMAIL

America the great

America means "greatness." I want my country to be the best. We are a nation of leaders, not followers. I can not stand to watch my fellow Americans sit on the sidelines and watch this great country slip away into mediocrity. Every individual has a gift to make a difference. We must not tolerate lies and excuses from all our pathetic politicians. JOHN MCLAUGHLIN, VIA EMAIL

letters@metro.us

Keep them as brief as possible, preferably under 100 words. Metro reserves the right to edit all letters. Please include your name and contact info.

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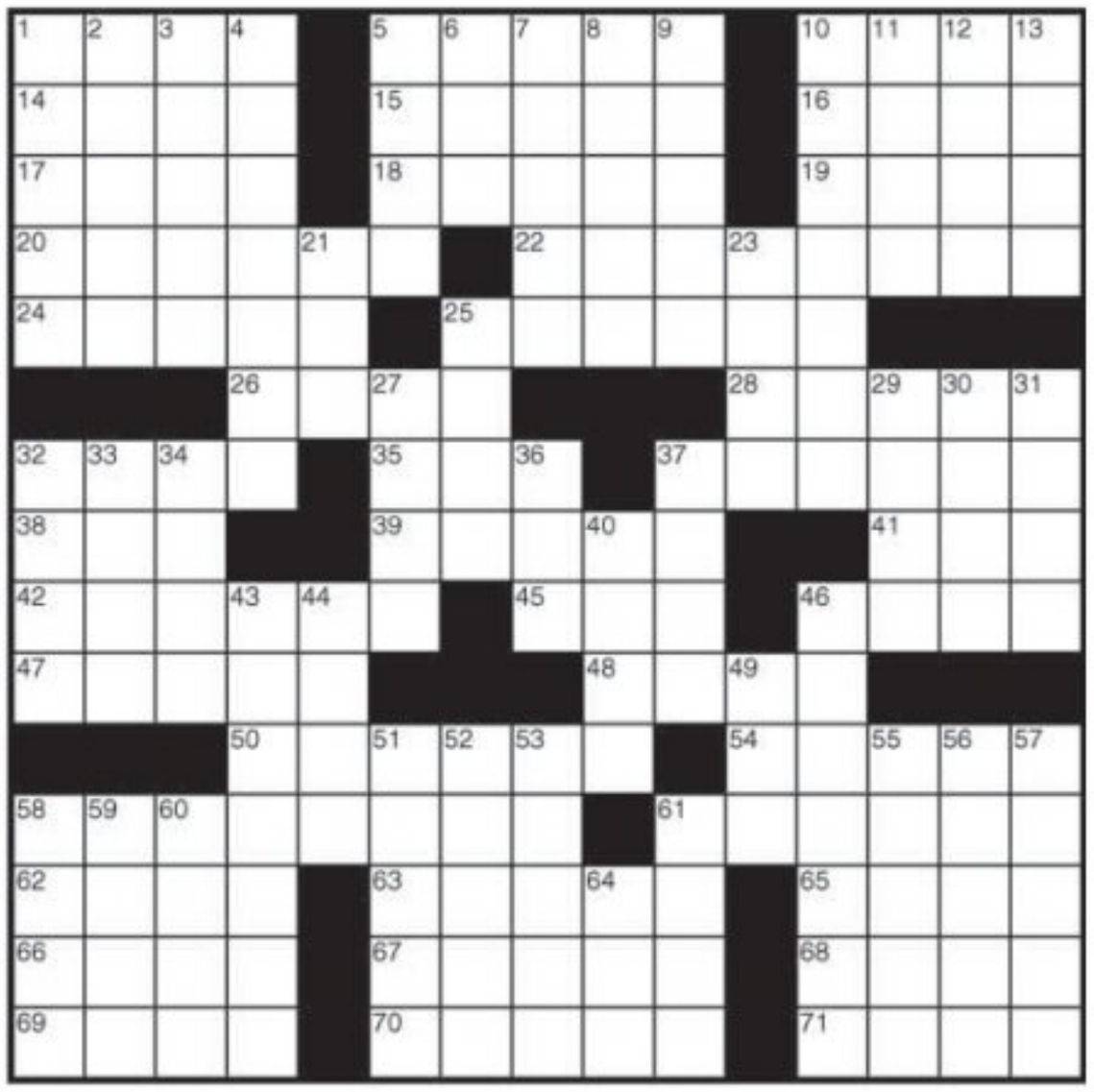
10 Catty remark
14 Pavarotti piece
15 Uma's "Gattaca" co-star
16 He wrote "Picnic"
17 Coffee dispensers
18 Hawaii red flower
19 Double agent
20 Mixer
22 Ajar
24 Wool fabric
25 Tan slacks
26 Visible
28 Where Valletta is
32 High-wire act, e.g.
35 Plunder
37 Take in
38 Pea-green boat passenger
39 Chasm
41 Yak
42 Echo
45 Hagen of "The Other"
46 Handle hassles
47 Mineral analysis
48 Elegant coiffure
50 Lurched
54 Not over
58 Daniel Boone's hat
61 Talisman
62 Chills and fever
63 Pentium producer
65 — spumante
66 Music and dance
67 Brain messenger
68 Desktop picture
69 Twig shelter
70 Conquistador's quality
71 "Forget it!"

Down
1 Goethe opus
2 Quiver filler
3 Dice
4 Least taxing
5 Spill the beans
6 Hwy.
7 Yup (hyph.)
8 Dry-heat bath
9 Midnight —
10 Flowering trees
11 Cabell or Slaughter
12 Stare rudely
13 Pesky plant
21 Citrus cooler
23 An arm or a leg
25 Door opener
27 Q.E.D. part
29 Trademark
30 Pitfall
31 French cleric
32 Knock — — loop
33 Flock members
34 Hannibal's route
36 Provo sch.
37 PDQ
40 Tie tack
43 Not kidding
44 Votes in parliament
46 Hold
49 Expected any time
51 Making ends meet
52 Eye enhancer
53 — nous
55 Music with a beat
56 Block, legally
57 Lorelei's river
58 James of "Rollerball"
59 People devourer
60 Ump's calls
61 Skedaddled
64 Morn's counterpart

Yesterday's answer



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3 SPORTS

Sixers fall in D.C.

Carter-Williams drops 31 in defeat

The 76ers faltered for the seventh time in eight games in a 107-99 loss in Washington against the Wizards Monday. Rookie Michael Carter-Williams was a bright spot in the letdown, scoring 31 points on 13-for-22 shooting. Spencer Hawes also had a big game, pulling down 16 rebounds to go along with 11 points.

EAGLES FANS MUST REJOICE IN BELICHICK'S PLAYOFF LOSS

There is a quiet elation in the streets of Philadelphia this week because the sports figure we hate the most has failed again. Bill Belichick was denied an NFL championship when his New England Patriots were eliminated by Denver on Sunday. The cheater lost. Justice was served.

Our deep disaffection for the grumpy coach is one of the least acknowledged local sports stories because few media people ever actually speak with the fans. These misguided writers and broadcasters just assume Philadelphia has forgotten that Belichick was caught cheating in the Eagles' only Super Bowl appearance in the past 33 years. Not a chance.

With failure after failure since Spygate — nine in a row now — our resentment builds over what happened in 2005. Ultimately, Belichick paid a fine of $500,000 and lost a first-round draft pick for snooping on opponents' practices with surveillance cameras, but he kept the three rings that he stole.

On my WIP radio show last Friday, co-host Hollis Thomas – a member of that 2005 Super Bowl team – said he would always root hard against Belichick. More fans than I could hope to get on the air were quick to add their bitterness to the conversation. Nine years later, Belichick is a bigger villain than ever here.

"We could have won that year," Thomas said. "We should have won. He cheated."

According to the former nose tackle, the Patriots clearly knew the Eagles' signals in that game, and they used them to great advantage throughout a 24-21 victory. Yes, the Eagles screwed up the final quarter with a plodding offense and indecisive coaching, but Thomas believes Spygate helped to create that confusion.

Is it just a coincidence that the Patriots, after winning three Super Bowls in four seasons before getting caught, have won none in the nine years since then? Is it odd that the NFL, faced with a scandal that challenged the results of several seasons, destroyed the tapes rather than fuel the debate?

Before his passing two years ago, former U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter understood how deep the frustration had become as he tried, several times, to gain approval for a Senate investigation into Spygate. Understandably, his fellow lawmakers felt the country had higher priorities.

No higher power will ever make right what went wrong in the three Super Bowls that Belichick won, but that doesn't make it any easier for us when Peyton Manning calls Belichick the greatest coach in NFL history, as he did last week. No clear-thinking Eagle fan will ever make a similar claim, not after Spygate.

So if people seem to have a little extra bounce in their step this week, now you know why. Bill Belichick lost again. Justice was served. Amen.

Patriots head coach Bill Belichick has won three Super Bowl titles, including in 2005 when the coach defeated Andy Reid and the Eagles, 24-21. / GETTY IMAGES

The Voice of Philly Sports

ANGELO CATALDI

Cataldi on Belichick

If people seem to have a little extra bounce in their step this week, now you know why. Bill Belichick lost again. Justice was served. Amen.

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NO CREDIT? BAD CREDIT? SLOW PAY?

Cataldi. Eagles fans see what could have been with safety Thomas

EARL THOMAS
GETTY IMAGES

Almost four years later, Earl Thomas still receives messages on Twitter from Eagles fans wishing he were on their team rather than heading to the Super Bowl with Seattle. Remember, the Birds traded up in the 2010 draft to select defensive end Brandon Graham. Thomas, an elite safety, went to the Seahawks with the very next pick.

That idiotic decision continues to haunt the Eagles today, as Graham has never risen above mediocrity while Thomas is developing into a modern version of Brian Dawkins. It became an even bigger issue in the past few weeks as the Eagles had to endure a dreadful season by Patrick Chung.

Why did the Eagles rate Graham higher than Thomas? The answer to that question is really more about their positions than the players. Even now, many self-proclaimed football experts think a great defensive end is more important than a game-changing safety.

Seattle is a compelling example of how wrong-headed and outdated that thinking truly is. The Seahawks are the No. 1 defense in the league because they have two safeties, Thomas and Kam Chancellor, who are equally effective against the run or pass.

The No. 1 priority of this off-season is to find a player who is much, much better than Chung.

Idle thoughts

- Richard Sherman's tirade after his game-saving play won the NFC championship for Seattle Sunday was completely insane. Instead of being heralded for his work, he is being reviled for his words. From a hero to a zero in one boastful, classless rant.
- Former manager Charlie Manuel is back in the Phillies organization, along with ousted broadcasters Chris Wheeler and Gary Matthews. Then there's another ex-skipper, Dallas Green, drawing a check, along with ex-GM Ed Wade. Is there a more loyal boss in pro sports than president Dave Montgomery?
- Now that Claude Giroux is playing like a superstar again, someone needs to remind the Flyer captain that great players don't have an on-off switch. How could someone so talented go cold so often?

Cataldi on the Phillies

Eagles have snatched spotlight back from Phillies

In a recent interview, Phillies second baseman Chase Utley said the Phillies "can compete" in 2014. / GETTY IMAGES

How desperate are the Phillies to revive interest in their declining franchise? They turned last week to their most admired, but least likely spokesman, when Chase Utley did an elaborate media tour preaching the hopes and dreams of the 2014 team.

In his typically understated way, Utley spoke about the potential of a club still filled with big names, even if most of them appear well past their primes because of injuries and age. Hope springs eternal, and Utley was nothing if not optimistic in his message to Philadelphia.

Unfortunately, the truth is far more sobering than Utley's rosy assessment. Not only are the Phils coming off a brutal 73-89 season, but their underwhelming winter is inspiring no one. When the boldest transaction is firing Chris Wheeler, an announcer who has tortured fans for 37 years, how can anyone buy Utley's pledge of allegiance?

The real story here is not just the steady dissolution of interest in the Phillies since 2008, but also the sudden resurgence of their primary sports rival in Philadelphia, the Eagles. Just a year ago, the Birds were in upheaval after the 14-year Andy Reid era, and the Phils were a year younger and a year closer to their glory days.

Now, the Eagles are back in their customary position of power, while the Phils are chasing far-fetched dreams. What Utley did last week was commendable, a reflection of his class and commitment. But his words changed nothing.

The Phillies are quickly becoming yesterday's news, and will continue to be so until they find a new direction the way the Eagles did. Even Chase Utley cannot change that sad reality.

ANGELO CATALDI

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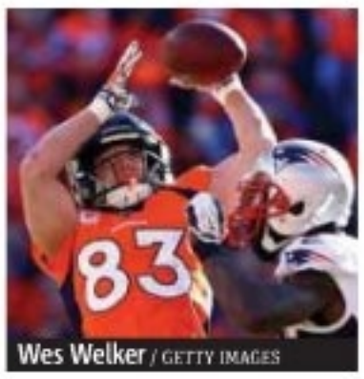
Belichick takes verbal swing at Welker for hit

NFL. The Broncos receiver tried to "take out" Aqib Talib in Sunday's game.


Wes Welker / GETTY IMAGES

If there were any question as to what kind of relationship Patriots head coach Bill Belichick and former Pats receiver Wes Welker currently have, Belichick answered it Monday, a day after New England's 26-16 loss to Denver in the AFC Championship game.

Belichick slammed Welker at his Monday press conference regarding the receiver's hit on cornerback Aqib Talib on a "pick play."

"I feel bad for Aqib, the way the play turned out," Belichick said. "It was a deliberate play by the receiver to take out Aqib. No attempt to get open. I'll let the league handle the discipline for that. It's not for me to decide, but it's one of the worst plays I've seen."

MATTHEW BURKE
matthew.burke@metro.us

Tumultuous time line

A look at Wes Welker and Bill Belichick through the years:

- In 2011, Welker was benched for making joking remarks about Jets head coach Rex Ryan.
- In 2012, Welker told CSNNE, "It's kind of nice to stick it in Bill's face once in a while."
- Welker told SI in 2013: "[Playing for Belichick] is one of those deals where you have to endure him, put up with him."

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Flyers aim for strong finish prior to break

NHL. The Flyers have been playing inconsistently with the Olympic break fast approaching.

Less than three weeks from now, the NHL season grinds to a halt. And this time it has nothing to do with a lockout, like the one last year that hijacked nearly half the season and turned the usual 82-game marathon into a 48-game sprint.

When the rest of the world turns its eyes on Sochi and the Olympics, they'll see the best of the best of the NHL — minus the Flyers' Claude Giroux. During those three weeks some teams will get plenty of rest, while others will cross their fingers hoping nobody from their team gets hurt when squads like Slovakia and Sweden go head-to-head.

Once they return from Russia it will be another wild race to the finish, where a slow start similar to the Flyers' 1-7 stumble out of the gate that cost Peter Laviolette his job could spell doom. All this puts a premium on finishing up the pre-Olympic portion of the schedule strong.

The Flyers faltered in a shootout Monday against the Islanders. They now face a sprint with nine games in 18 days. / GETTY IMAGES

Pre-Sochi sprint

9

The Flyers have nine games in the next 18 days leading up to the Olympic break. Five of those contests are at home.

Following yesterday's 4-3 shootout loss on Long Island, in which they blew a 3-1 lead in the last 12 minutes to complete a home-and-home series, the Flyers stand 25-19-6, placing them third in the Metropolitan and sixth in the East pending Toronto's late game. In the process, they've already matched a franchise record — coming back to win nine games in which they trailed in the third period. Even after letting this one get away, they're still 9-3-2 since Dec. 21.

The 20-19-9 Hurricanes are the Flyers' next opponent, tonight at 7 at the Wells Fargo Center. They have slipped to 13th, yet trail eighth place Columbus by just three points.

Speaking of the Blue Jackets, who have won six in a row to move into the final playoff spot for the moment, they're next on the Flyers agenda. That means Sergei Bobrovsky is likely to go against his old club for the first time Thursday.

Among Philadelphia's remaining eight games after tonight — including a potentially brutal quickie California trip next week to Anaheim, L.A. and San Jose — six are against teams currently locked into playoff spots. Craig Berube's gang also faces the Atlantic Division-leading Bruins, Detroit and Colorado here before wrapping it up against Calgary Feb. 8.

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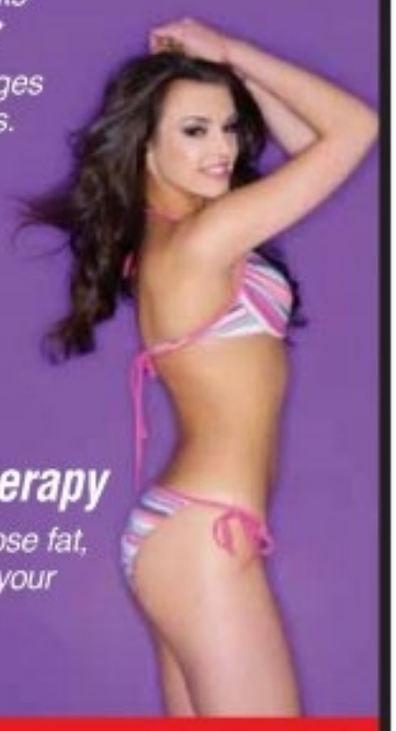
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To obtain a copy of the RFPs visit www.intelafunds.net and go to "Bid Opportunities" or you may find RFP copies on the schools website at www.dvchs.net. Questions regarding this request can be sent to Remy Bibaud at remy@intelagentresources.com or by calling 412-231-1515.

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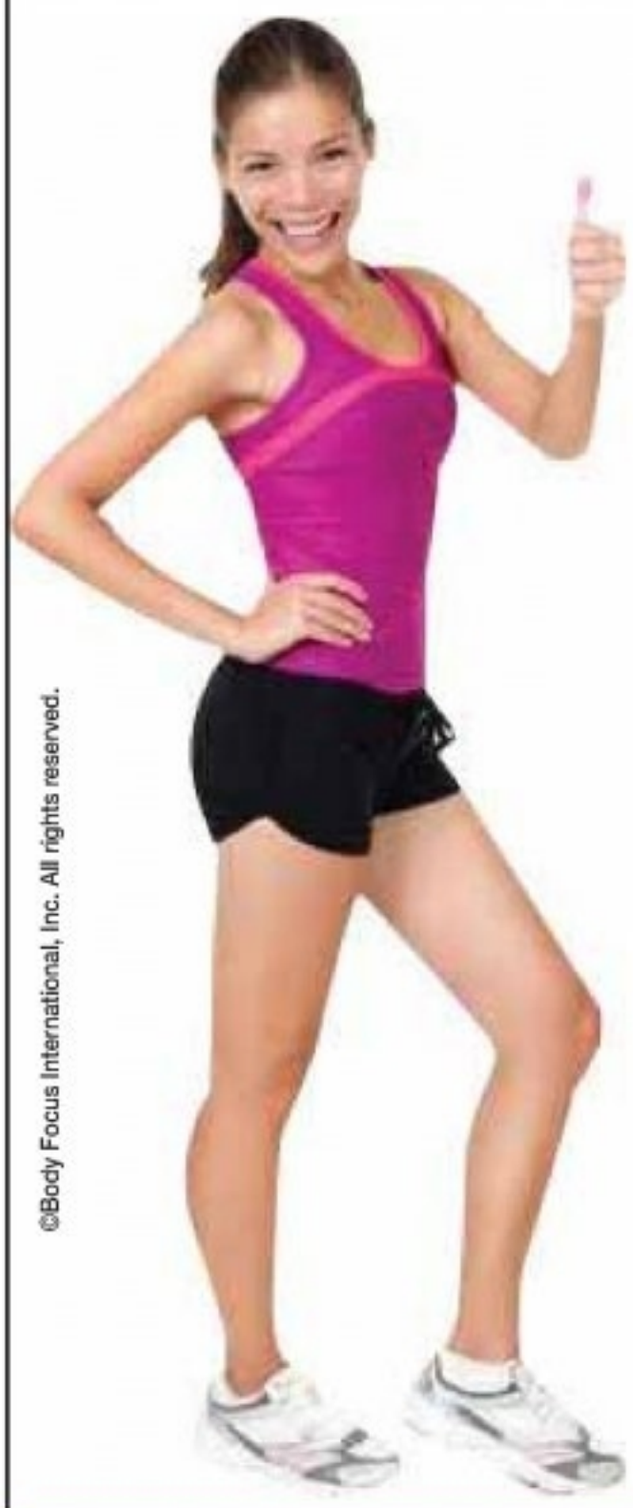

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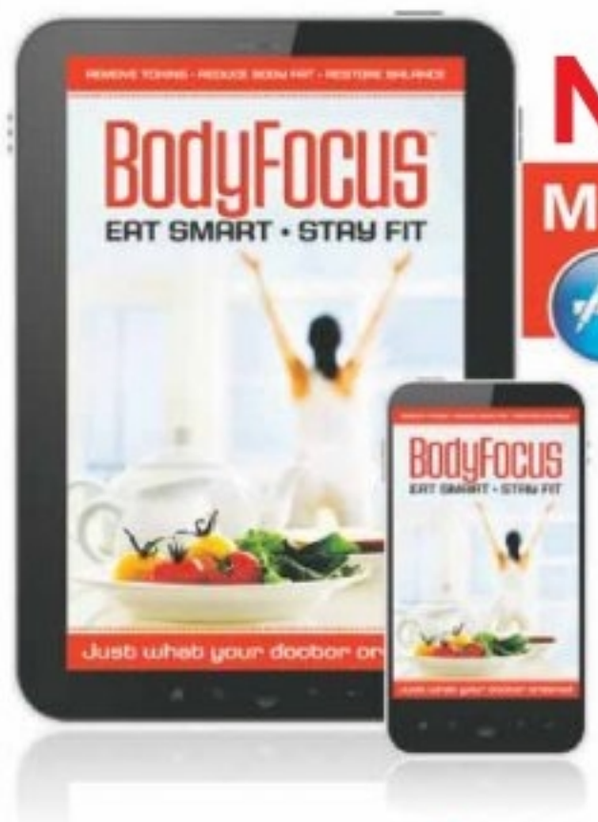

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